

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 144-PRAY HONESTLY

I'm Jill Baughan, and you're listening to the podcast called Find Joy...No Matter What.

This is Episode 144.

If you're in a tough place right now, your joy may seem like it's hiding--or gone.

I understand. But it's still there, I promise, just waiting to be resurrected. And this podcast is designed to help you do just that...no matter what else is going on in your life.

For just a few minutes each week, I'll tell you a story--one that just might inspire a way to uncover a piece of joy you might be looking for. Then, we'll consider how it might speak to your life, because even though you'll hear quite a few of my stories during our time together, I believe you'll find your own in every one of mine.

Finally, I'll offer a benediction to send you into your day--or into your night.

So. If you're up for doing joy shots with a friend today...have a listen.

Sometimes it's hard to be yourself in front of God and everybody else.

Prayer in the presence of others can be especially daunting sometimes because it's harder to be totally honest when other people are actually listening. Or waiting.

I remember standing in prayer circles in high school, being encouraged to offer up a prayer, each person in the circle, in order. If you wanted to "pass," you just squeezed the hand of the person next to you to signal "Not me, Bro. Your ball."

But you knew that if you "passed," everybody would know you "passed," so there was that pressure to push through your fear of sounding inarticulate at best, stupid at worst. And you pushed through anyway, but spent most of the prayer time not praying because you were trying to figure out what you were going to pray.

And doggone it, if somebody else two squeezes ahead of you prayed for exactly the same thing you were planning on, you were back at inarticulate square one again.

And the pressure to fill dead air in the name of Jesus can start when we're very young.

When my husband was a little boy, he was in a churchwide prayer meeting. And although he was only 7 or 8, somehow he already gotten the idea that, in a roomful of people, silence in the presence of the Almighty was an undesirable thing. So when everyone bowed their heads and closed their eyes, and nothing happened—not one person was offering up any sound whatsoever--he decided to take the prayer bull by the horns. "Oh Lord!" he fairly shouted, "Bless all the nations of the earth!!"

Well, at least the attendees weren't silent any more; they were so busy muffling their laughter, nobody could really pray with any dignity.

But there were still no other petitions being lifted up.

So Ben tried again. "Oh Lord!" his little voice bounced off the sanctuary walls. "Bless all the nations of the earth!"

I think they had to let everybody go after that, since prayer was pretty much a lost cause.

A little later in life, he was given a dubious lesson about prayer: It could be used as punishment.

One day in Sunday School, apparently he and his friends got a little too rowdy. And he's always remembered his teacher's solution to whipping those boys into shape. In order to shut them up, settle them down, and throw in a side of fear and intimidation, she issued a warning by telling them, "If you boys don't straighten up right now, I'm going to make you pray out loud."

Well. *That's* inspirational.

But you might know that as challenging as it can be to be yourself in public prayer, sometimes, it's even harder for us to be totally honest in private prayer—especially when life isn't going well.

Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie talk about this in their book, *Good Enough*,

Today, Kate says, might be the kind of day when you are feeling it most—the loneliness that comes with suffering. That's because it is your alone. No one else can see with your eyes, or feel what you feel...

And if you're like me, that's when prayer sometimes adds to the loneliness. Where is God when you pray and ask for help, but it doesn't come? Why doesn't God answer? How can I believe in a God who doesn't seem to see me or hear me?

Illness, grief, or any kind of suffering in this world feels like it doesn't belong in a world made by a good God. It is just wrong. And painful. And frankly, sometimes just infuriating. I find myself praying, "God, the world really seems like a terrible character reference for You. I know people say You are good, but I don't see much evidence today."

Acute suffering cries out for an answer. We need the pain to stop. Right now! Our urgent call longs to be met by a strong wise and loving answer. We want healing and answers and strength to go on. But so often we hear nothing at all.

Instead of rushing to defend God or dissect the great mystery of the problem of evil, I have found it to be wonderfully freeing to begin with the truth. As my best friend likes to remind me on awful days:

*You feel hurt, because it's painful.
You feel sad, because it's tragic.
You feel angry, because it's unfair.*

You are okay to feel what you feel. We need freedom to acknowledge the brutality of life without minimizing or pretending or justifying. We need no rush to defend God or delude ourselves. It is terrible. And it is happening.

When I asked Father James Martin, author and Jesuit priest, about how I might pray in awful seasons—after pain, after disappointment—he suggested that I might be on the right track already. Prayer, he said, begins with acts of unbridled honesty. “God, this isn’t enough. God, I can barely make it through the hour.”

I would prefer a world run by formulas. I am good, and therefore I will thrive. I am loving, so no one can leave me. I am hardworking, so I can never be slowed and stopped by sickness and death and disability and despair. The life I want is predictable, controllable, and fundamentally fair. But instead I see that reality is infused by war and violence, illness and hurricanes.

And if you’re wondering, yes. People love to hear this perspective at parties.

Just kidding.

But all the good things that can come from prayer—trust, acceptance, connection, occasional miracles—are there waiting for us. But first comes radical honesty. The more genuine our prayers, the more freedom there is to acknowledge the reality of all a life with God can be.

In the meantime, she reminds us, tell God. All of it. Fiercely. Even the unanswered prayers. Don’t leave out a single one. Even if you sit among broken things and your confidence seems to shrink with each day, know that you may feel lonely but you are not alone. You are united in love with all of suffering humanity, and with our God who came to suffer and die. A God of sorrows, acquainted with grief. But one who also came that we might have life.

And so, my friends,

May you be feel the freedom to be totally honest with God about what it’s like to be you right now,

And may you be unafraid to lay your doubt and anger, your grief and your questions, your fears—your whole honest self at his feet,

And, when you do, may you feel understood and validated, knowing that He hears you, He loves you and He wants to bless you...and *aaall* the nations of the earth...so very much.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who hesitate to bring their ugly parts to God, I invite you to share this podcast with them, and subscribe yourself on iTunes, or wherever you listen to podcasts. Or you can go to my website at jillbaughan.com, click on a podcast episode and sign up to receive episodes in your inbox. Just don't miss a single one, because I so look forward to being with you again soon.

Pray honestly, my friend. And always, always remember, if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTE:

Bowler, Kate, and Jessica Richie. *Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection*. Convergent Books, 2022. (pp. 134-136)